

Growth Inducement and Related Effects

This page intentionally left blank.

Chapter 19

Growth Inducement and Related Effects

As a community grows, the environment—natural and “built”—is affected in many ways. Expansion of developed areas can reduce available wildlife habitat, impair water quality as a result of urban contaminants in stormwater runoff, and permanently alter the visual character of the region. A growing population increases school enrollments; elevates demand for water supply, utilities, and waste management; and adds traffic to area roadways. Additional traffic in turn can increase the generation of noise and air pollution, while degrading the quality of roadway service as reflected in traffic flow, travel times, and driver stress levels. At a broader scale, population growth ultimately shifts the pattern of land use as open space and agricultural lands give way to expanding urban and suburban uses. Because of the potential for population growth to alter the human and natural environment, both NEPA and CEQA require environmental documents, including EIRs/EISs, to evaluate and discuss a proposed undertaking’s potential to induce population growth (*growth inducing effects* or *growth inducement*), and assess the potential indirect effects of any growth induced by the project.

An action is considered *growth inducing* if it directly or indirectly fosters economic or population growth or the construction of additional housing; or encourages other activities that could result in significant environmental effects (CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15126.2[d]). A project may also be considered growth inducing if it removes an existing obstacle to growth, such as insufficient transportation or water supply infrastructure.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the proposed action’s potential for growth inducement and discuss the potential outcomes of such growth. Because all three action alternatives and the No Action Alternative would enable the same program of O&M and minor construction activities as the proposed action, this analysis also applies to the alternatives.

Planning for Growth—the General Plan Process

California law requires local jurisdictions to develop comprehensive, long-term general plans to guide their land use decision-making and physical development (Government Code Section 65300 *ff.*). The intent is to ensure that growth takes place in a controlled manner, with an appropriate balance of land uses maintained and all necessary services provided. This goal is reflected in the general plan

contents mandated under Government Code Section 65302—of the seven mandatory “elements” or chapters, three relate directly to growth: the land use element establishes the pattern of future land uses, the circulation element plans the road system that will serve approved land uses, and the housing element identifies the means by which the city or county will contribute its fair share to meeting projected regional housing needs for all income groups.

Recognizing that growth is inevitable in many, if not all, communities, a primary purpose of general plan development is to provide strategies and policies that will ensure orderly and “healthy” growth for the community. In many cases, this is reflected in a stipulation that development can proceed only when there is certainty that adequate and appropriately sized utilities and services will be available. Most general plans also establish the city’s or county’s desired ratios for services such as schools and fire and police protection, and set minimum standards for traffic flow on area transportation networks. They may also articulate goals for recreational and cultural facilities, preservation of natural and “heritage” resources, maintenance of aesthetic values, and development of alternative transportation modalities such bicycle and pedestrian paths.

Because general plans are conceived as long-term documents, with a typical planning horizon on the order of 20 years, most are intended to provide a framework to accommodate substantial population growth.

Growth-Related Effects of the Proposed Action

Direct Effects

As described in Chapter 2, the proposed action would enable several types of activities under the aegis of PG&E’s San Joaquin Valley O&M program. These include minor construction such as replacing or upgrading facilities and extending electrical and natural gas service to supply new customers. Facilities upgrades and extension of service to additional customers would directly serve new growth. Although it is expected that new or extended infrastructure installed under the proposed action would be sited near existing infrastructure and development, their precise nature, number, and locations are uncertain at this time, and they could serve any combination of residential, commercial, and/or industrial uses. In addition, because of the way the electrical grid is operated, power provided by PG&E may also be routed to areas of California not directly served by PG&E, or to customers in other western states. Thus, the location, timing, and nature of growth served by the proposed action cannot be predicted with certainty at this time, but the overwhelming majority of such growth in California currently occurs as planned growth via the general plan process, and this is expected to continue to be the case in the future.

Provision of essential services without which growth cannot take place may be identified as “removing an obstacle to growth,” which represents one type of growth inducement recognized by the state’s CEQA guidelines (CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15126.2[d]). If utility service were expanded or upgraded *in*

advance of the requirements of currently planned growth, rather than *in response to* needs identified to support currently planned growth, this could be considered growth inducing because essential services would be provided without which additional future growth could not occur. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, PG&E is legally required to provide new or expanded service as needs are identified through the local jurisdiction planning process, and the company expands its facilities and constructs new ones only in response to specific, identified needs for service. In this sense, the O&M activities enabled by the proposed action are more properly considered growth accommodating rather than growth inducing. Moreover, Section 15126.2[d] of the state's CEQA Guidelines explicitly cautions against assuming that growth is "necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment." In light of these considerations, the proposed action's potential to induce growth is considered less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Indirect Effects

Growth served by new or expanded infrastructure installed under the proposed action would have some potential to result in corollary indirect impacts on natural and built environmental resources, including air quality, ambient noise, traffic infrastructure, water supply, and biological resources; and possibly also cultural and paleontological resources.

As identified above, the majority of any new growth served by new facilities constructed under the proposed action would likely occur as planned growth in areas that have undergone the general plan process. As such, it would be regulated by the goals and policies embodied in the applicable general plan, and by local ordinances and regulations that enact general plan policies, which would help to avoid and reduce potential adverse effects. Effects of growth on natural resources would be further buffered by standards and requirements of federal and state environmental regulations, including

- the federal and state Clean Air Acts;
- the federal Clean Water Act and applicable Basin Plans;
- California Senate Bills 610 and 221 of 2001, which prohibit approval of moderate-sized and large development projects without documentation that adequate water supply will be available to support the resulting new demand;
- the federal and state Endangered Species Acts; and
- other federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

In addition, new development would almost certainly require separate environmental review under CEQA and/or NEPA, entailing further site- and project-specific analysis of environmental effects.

In any case, because PG&E only provides new or expanded service in response to—not in advance of—an area's identified need, and the proposed action's

potential to *induce* growth has thus been evaluated as less than significant, its potential to result in adverse effects as outcomes of growth is also considered less than significant. No mitigation is required.